

Lake Forest technology paraprofessional named Delaware 2022 Educational Support Professional of the Year

A computer lab/technology paraprofessional from Lake Forest School District's Lake Forest East Elementary School is the state's 2022 Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year.

Secretary of Education Susan Bunting surprised David Thomas by presenting him with the award at his school this morning.

"David is praised by his colleagues for his leadership and collaboration. His support of students, families and educators alike has made him an essential member of his school community, and he well represents the critical roles educational support professionals play in schools across our state," Bunting said.

Former East Principal Douglas W. Brown said students, families and East staff have relied on Thomas throughout the pandemic.

"Dave fulfilled every request or question every teacher, parent or student had about Zoom, Pear Deck, Clever, camera views, etc., without ever complaining," he said. "If there were ever a year for someone such as Dave to be recognized for their efforts, it is definitely this year of the pandemic because without Dave, East does not make it through with the successes that they had."

Thomas, an 11-year paraprofessional, said he wants his students to understand the importance of technology as a tool

to advance their learning.

“Technology is more than video games, tablets, and phones. Use of a mouse for precision and the ability to type proficiently are essential,” he said. “My students graduate from East Elementary school with confidence in their typing abilities and use of Microsoft Office applications. My third graders even create PowerPoint presentations before they start fourth grade! Often I hear back from their teachers how advanced the students from East are when they move on to their next school.”

Thomas has led several initiatives at the school. In 2014 as schools were looking for more STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) opportunities for students, Thomas led the implementation of MinecraftEDu, the educational version of the popular Minecraft game.

“MinecraftEdu is a specialized modification to the game that creates teacher-controlled virtual worlds through the school’s local network that allows students to work as teams, create code, use geometry principles to create structures, and solve complex problems,” Thomas said. “This pilot program has become a staple of the technology classroom at East Elementary, and it has helped students to develop a love of the inner workings of technology.”

Five years ago, Thomas also launched a live video morning show that is broadcast in each classroom. He and his co-host present school happenings and try to engage students, who have the chance to appear as special guests on the live show and be meteorologists for the day sharing weather reports.

“We build vocabulary with words of the week, dive into social studies with our ‘This Day in History’ segments, expand our minds with weekly Growth Mindset instruction, and read student submitted jokes on ‘Funny Friday!’ ” he said.

Lake Forest Superintendent Steven V. Lucas congratulated

Thomas on his honor: "We are so proud that Mr. Thomas has been named the Delaware Education Support Professional of the Year. Mr. Thomas brings to Lake Forest East Elementary School a blend of knowledge and enthusiasm for learning which is unmatched. He is a tireless worker, a selfless leader, and a superlative representative for Lake Forest and our great state".

Thomas is one of 19 educational support professionals honored this year. Each was chosen to represent their districts or the Delaware Charter School Network in the state's Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year Program.

The Delaware State Educational Support Professional of the Year (ESPY) program recognizes outstanding service by school employees who provide direct or indirect services to students and their families. The Delaware Charter School Network also is invited to participate. Employees considered for the award include:

- Paraprofessionals
- Custodial staff
- Secretaries
- Nutritional staff
- School- and district-employed bus drivers
- School- and district-employed bus aides

From those nominated at a building level, one educational support professional of the year moves forward to represent each district or the charter school community in the state program. Each district/charter network winner receives a \$1,000 personal award from the winner's district or charter school. The state program then chooses one person annually to serve as Delaware's Educational Support Professional of the Year. State winners receive an additional \$1,500 personal award from DD0E as well as \$2,500 to be used for the educational benefit of his or her students.

A selection committee reviewed the local winners' state applications to select the 2022 Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year. This year's selection committee members were: Chaneya Edwards (Delaware Department of Education), Stephanie Ingram (Delaware State Education Association), John Marinucci (Delaware School Boards Association), Wendy Turner (State Board of Education), and Alice Williams (2021 Delaware Educational Support Professional of the Year).

DDOE is excited to recognize Thomas and all of these outstanding professionals whose work is vital to students' success.

The 19 nominees are:

- Appoquinimink: Wendy Schweiker, paraprofessional, Appoquinimink High School
- Brandywine: Angela Hamilton, paraprofessional, Concord High School
- Caesar Rodney: Alma Bartolomeo, paraprofessional, W.B. Simpson Elementary
- Cape Henlopen: Bryant Hazzard, paraprofessional, Mariner Middle School
- Capital: Darien "Stretch" Robinson, paraprofessional, William Henry Middle School
- Charter Network: Rachael Dallas, systems administrator, MOT Charter School
- Christina: Clara Doyle, ESL paraprofessional, Leasure Elementary School
- Colonial: Jennifer Dunford, child nutrition worker, Colwyck Center
- Delmar: Danielle Youngblood, administrative assistant/eSchool coordinator, Delmar Middle and Senior High School
- Indian River: Gwendolyn Gillespie, paraprofessional, Georgetown Elementary School
- Lake Forest: David Thomas, computer lab/technology

- paraprofessional, Lake Forest East Elementary School
- Milford: Patrick Seibel, technology specialist, secondary campus
 - New Castle County Vo-Tech: Lindsay Gliniak, senior secretary, St. Georges Technical High School
 - POLYTECH: Sandra S. Henning, information technology help desk technician, POLYTECH High School
 - Red Clay Consolidated: Christopher ChuJoy, autism instructional support paraprofessional, Anna P. Mote Elementary School
 - Seaford: Mark Murphy, custodian, Seaford Middle School
 - Smyrna: Donella Berryman, financial administrative assistant, North Smyrna Elementary School
 - Sussex Tech: Jacques O. Bowe, Jr., paraprofessional, Sussex Technical High School
 - Woodbridge: Virginia Martinez, ESL paraprofessional, Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

Find photos of the nominees and learn more about the program [here](#).

Find photos and videos from today's surprise announcement [here](#).

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